

COMMONWEAL

TRUE MULTICULTURALISM

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NOT TO WORRY

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Lionel S. Lewis

ON SCHOOLS

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AREY

AMS

Chords of Memory

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Jonathan Kozol ILAN STAVANS on

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent

ELIZABETH BEVERLY on Garrison Keillor's WLT

EDUCATION ISSUE

CORRESPONDENCE

Let Ireland be Ireland

Staten Island, N.Y.

To the Editors: The Irish people in referendum, a most democratic means of expressing a people's will, determined that there shall be no government cooperation in destroying the life of a fetus except to save the life of a mother, and put that into law [editorial, March 13]. The Irish authorities were upholding that law in not cooperating with a fourteen-year-old girl who wanted to go to England to have an abortion.

This girl could have gone to England and had the abortion before she brought charges in law against the man she says impregnated her through rape. Once charges were made, the state was involved, and those who work for the state were not permitted to cooperate.

It is inadmissible that the Irish should be adopting American or British practice on abortion, nor should the Irish paradigm be used in this country to support or hinder abortion. Your use of an Irish typology serves no purpose since this is not a Catholic country.

In a minority opinion one of the Irish Supreme Court justices said that the life of the unborn fetus should not have been destroyed when that life had been protected by a government injunction, a traditional and valid Catholic position on abortion.

JOHN BRANIGAN

One of the above

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I should like to point out to John Garvey, who plans to draw the line ["None of the Above," February 28], that it is impossible to be apolitical in a presidential election. He can either vote actively by choosing the candidate he sees as best (or as least reprehensible), or he can vote passively for whoever happens to win. If he likes the outcome, so be it, but take note that "None of the Above" never wins an election. There are no run-offs. The winner needs only a plurality of votes cast, not a majority.

Thus, someone who sits out the election gives the winner a negative vote, the one less he needs to defeat the opponent for whom one less vote has been cast. The satisfaction of having come away unsullied from a situation inevitably involving compromise is a chimera. Those who did not vote in 1968 because Humphrey was not enough of a dove bear their share of responsibility for Nixon's victory and, therefore, for dirty tricks, Watergate, the Pentagon Papers...and, yes, for four or five more years of war, the bombing of Hanoi, the rape of Cambodia, among other consequences.

I admit that the illiberal stance of the Democratic party on *Roe v. Wade* is wrong, but if Bush wins Mr. Garvey and others who refuse to vote on this ground need to acknowledge their complicity in promoting environmental Band-Aids, in such solutions to economic problems as Japan-bashing and visits to supermarkets, to say nothing of any other surgical wars we may stumble into. And they will bear responsibility as well for the saddest of abortions, those to which women who want their babies are forced to resort because there is nowhere to turn for help under a government which pretends to do something about its monumental debt by cutting funds for social programs, and adds insult to injury by blaming our ills on welfare bums.

MARIAN BURKHART

To Shea: Yes, but

Trumansburg, N.Y.

To the Editors: "Dual Loyalties in Catholic Theology" by William M. Shea [January 31] was illuminating, delving into the tensions that develop as experts try to keep the heart of their heritage while enriching it with insights from other sources.

I would still like to see a straightforward statement about the unique place of Jesus Christ. If we accept his claims—"I am the way, the truth, and the life"—that puts him in a position above all others.

(REV.) ROBERT KANKA

Conscience rules

Collegeville, Minn.

To the Editors: Could I add a historical note to Russell B. Connors, Jr.'s "Contraception & Communion: Bishop Flavin Has It Wrong" [March 13]? Here is my published report on the American bishops' meeting in November 1968 as they worked on "Human Life in Our Day," their official response to the birth control encyclical, *Humanae vitae*:

"First, after serious discussion the bishops changed the pope's language from 'intrinsically wrong' (*ideoque intrinsece inhonestum*) to 'objective moral disorder,' or 'objective evil.' So important is the word 'intrinsic' in the natural law tradition used by the pope, that change from 'intrinsic' to 'objective' is significant. For the pope, contraception is 'intrinsically wrong' because it frustrates 'the design established by the creator' and 'contradicts the author of life' (*Humanae vitae*, no. 14).

"Then, the encyclical gives no hint of a possible contrary decision in conscience. Many American bishops wanted to introduce the classic objective-subjective distinction, not used in *Humanae vitae*. Artificial birth control could be seen to be an 'objective' or 'pre-moral' evil. Subjectively, guilt could

(Continued on page 28)

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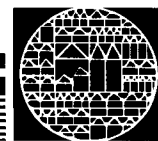
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COMMONWEAL



The road taken

As one looks down the road for the future of South Africa, it is not hard to see trouble. Civil war is possible—not simply between blacks and whites, but within each group. Violence, terrorism, and thuggery now constitute a form of low-level civil war among blacks. Some of this internecine conflict rises out of the very prospect of change and genuine political power for black South Africans. But at least some of these warring factions have been funded and supplied with weapons by whites opposed to the new order. Right-wingers are eager to foment violence and intertribal struggle in the black community, which in turn will heighten fear among whites and resistance to the reforms that President F.W. de Klerk has set in motion. Though the white community may have given up on apartheid, there are still those who argue for a substitute—national homelands based on race. There are other whites who see that a new accommodation must be reached, but who hope to retain the social and economic privileges that apartheid has provided them. Those whites who can imagine living under what South Africa must ultimately become—a black majority government—are certainly in a very distinct minority. To this political uncertainty add widespread drought and a sluggish economy.

And the list could go on and on. It is not hard to imagine why South Africa might have an exceedingly dismal future.

And yet, despite all of this, there are reasons for hope. At the moment, the major one is the overwhelming vote by white South Africans in favor of reform and a new constitution, along with general approval of the path along which President de Klerk would like to lead the country. In what is certainly the final whites-only referendum, 68.7 percent agreed, as de Klerk said after the election, that the country had “closed the book” on the ideology of apartheid. In defending his decision to call the referendum and restrict it to whites, de Klerk noted the “element of justice” in asking those who had started apartheid to end it. “It doesn’t often happen that in one generation a nation gets the opportunity to rise above itself. The white electorate has risen above itself in this referendum.” That some did so for an utterly pragmatic reason—the threat of a renewed international boycott of South African businesses and its sports teams, especially a champion soccer team—only serves to underline the degree to which ideology has fallen to reality.

Nelson Mandela is another reason for hope. Mandela’s moral authority, his hold on the African National Congress, and his conviction that a multiracial society will benefit all South Africans makes him de Klerk’s primary negotiating partner in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, the forum that will negotiate a new power relationship among blacks, colored, and whites. Two leaders, able to call forth the best from their people, may be what is needed to look a precarious future in the eye and rise above it.

THE LAND IS HOLY

KEEP IT THAT WAY

f “spin control” means getting others to see a situation the way we want it to be seen, it’s neither good nor bad in itself; it can be done by fair means or foul, for evil or noble ends, clumsily or with art. We all have it done unto us, we all do it unto others; I’ll be doing it here. Cain was practicing spin control when he asked the Lord, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” So was Lincoln when he gave the Gettysburg Address. The problem is in distinguishing between the artful but true and the merely tricky.

Israel needs housing to accommodate new arrivals from the former Soviet Union, and must borrow money to pay for it; it wants loan guarantees from the U.S. Treasury to lower interest costs (though, by the time this reaches print, it may have abandoned the effort). The Bush administration says fine, so long as none of the housing goes up in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Enter spin control, focusing in large part, as so often, on motives. Partisans of the Israeli government say that George Bush and James Baker are using U.S. dollars to bully Israel, interfering in its internal affairs and domestic politics, favoring Labor over Likud, putting Israel at risk by ignoring its legitimate security concerns, thereby revealing anti-Israeli or anti-Semitic attitudes. Defenders of Bush and Baker say that Israel is using its clout in Congress to bully the administration into abandoning its own principles, thereby sapping the already feeble peace process and clearing the way toward outright annexation of the territories.

Since 1969, when I visited the region, I have held that Israel can be not less but more secure—and more democratic, truer to the best elements of Judaism and Zionism as I understand them, and even happier—if the peoples of the disputed territories come to know with certainty that eventually (and rather soon)

they will be able to govern themselves; particularly if those who now control them can give up control generously and with grace.

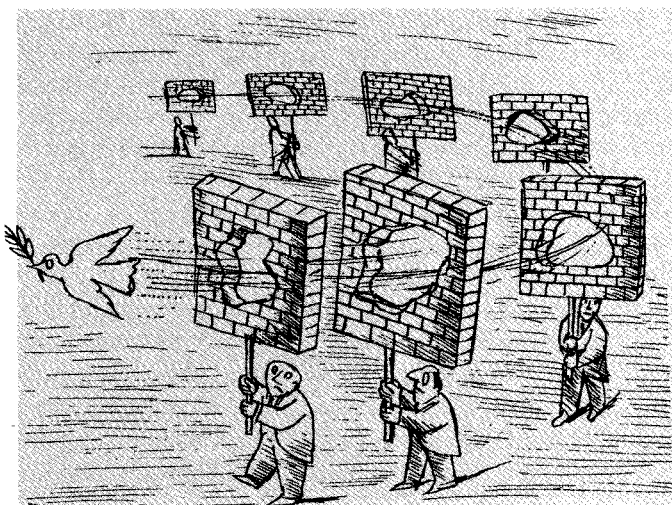
A booklet and a paperbound book I’ve scanned this week have deepened, hardened, and softened these views. The booklet is published in Jerusalem by an Israeli human rights organization called B’Tselem which monitors the behavior of the security forces in the territories. The atrocities it reports are not as murderous as those committed by the current regimes in, say, Syria or Iraq. They are still atrocious; the reports are painful to read. Are these things really happening? The booklet is convincing to me because it conforms to things I’ve seen for myself and read about elsewhere; because B’Tselem gets its funding from mainstream U.S. and Israeli foundations; because sources are cited and rebuttals are given space; because the booklet’s language is restrained, nonemotive; and because, despite their coolly detached style, the Israeli compilers seem to me to be asking an anguished question: “What are we doing *to ourselves*?”

The paperback book is *Voices from Jerusalem: Jews and Christians Reflect on the Holy Land* (David Burrell, C.S.C., and Yezhezkel Landau, eds.; Paulist Press, 176 pp., \$9.95). I have always approached the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as essentially a political issue, involving questions both of abstract justice and doable pragmatism; what is fair, what will work. Being perhaps overfamiliar with the misuse of religion to justify the unjustifiable (the Crusaders screamed “God wills it!” on their way to slaughter; the burning at the stake of Jews and heretics had churchly sanction), I have always rejected and resented the claim by religious Zionists that all parts of *Eretz Yisrael* belong to the state of Israel by divine election. I still reject the claim; why should Palestinians of any or no faith accept subjection in or ouster from their ancestral lands because of a particularist interpretation, one they do not share, of the Hebrew Bible? Why should the rest of the world accept such an outcome? Why should the U.S. help pay for it?

In the space available I can’t fully explain why the essays in *Voices* have “softened” (I can’t think of a better word) my once near-scornful rejection of the Zionist claim. What the essayists (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish; American, Armenian, Israeli, Dutch, French) convey is a realization that the Holy Land, despite all the unholy things that go on there, is indeed a holy land; a tiny acreage where events took place that are momentous to all of us. The Christian essayists deepened my grasp of the sacredness of this place for us. The Jewish contributors, who define themselves as religious Zionists, convinced me that the Israeli claim to all of Palestine based on sacred history is not (for these writers at least) a political ploy but an honestly held belief. What persuaded me of their sincerity was their willingness to make territorial compromises for the sake of peace and justice. Giving up the territories, in their view, would be like accepting an amputation for the sake of the health of the whole body. Hanging on to them and continuing to subjugate their population would be a more serious violation of Torah.

This stuff may not be of much use to spin controllers defending U.S. policy; it helps me and maybe others.

ROBERT G. HOYT



PROCHOICE ON SCHOOLS

TIME TO RALLY 'ROUND

The demands of justice, and the opportunity for success, call for strong Catholic action to promote educational choice. There are three parts to this argument. The first is that the American church has an enormous and wholly legitimate self-interest in voucher-type aid to parents. Much of the character of that church is manifested in parental and church desire to offer to children

educational environments informed by Roman Catholic values. The commitment to that ideal produced the great American Catholic school system, now being crushed in the educational vise of escalating costs, on the one hand, and the policy of public financing monopoly on the other. A brief look at the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* shows, for example, that in the last quarter-century the Catholic school population has fallen from approximately 11 percent of the total American school population in 1965 to approximately 5 percent now, even as the Catholic population increased as a percent of national population. And the greatest collapse in the Catholic school system, of course, is in the center of the major cities, where the only good education often is from such schools, and where the poor look most hopefully to religious schools for relief from the bleak horizon they otherwise have.

Many groups for many reasons have a large stake and interest

D Robert Hovda, R.I.P.

Death was one of the few things that ever took Bob Hovda by surprise. But only in part: he had plans for February 5 and the following days, certainly, but he also had the instructions clearly marked for those who found his body that night—what to do with his body (medical school if they'll have it) and his papers (in perfect order), and a brief instruction for the church that would gather to remember him. He died in his bed (like the wonderful old prayer: "Four corners to my bed,/Four angels there aspread,/Two to foot and two to head/and four to carry me when I'm dead") in his little two-room, fourth-floor walk-up: public housing on New York City's Lower East Side. He went gently, rare for him.

He was seventy-one, a priest of Fargo, North Dakota, where he had served more than ten years after ordination, writer and speaker on the church, heir to Virgil Michel and all who had it straight about church and liturgy and life and justice and economy and power, teacher-without-classroom to two generations who mourn a world without him. In addition to the many books and articles that bear his name, Hovda was principal author of *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. This 1978 document of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy remains our clearest statement about who does this liturgy of ours: ourselves, the baptized, the assembly, the church.

Hovda saw and spoke clearly and constantly of the implications of such a liturgy. His raspy voice was heard all over the country. His urgency and humor, the excellence of his rhetoric and the public struggles of his own life made him a unique figure in the liturgical renewal. He berated the church from solid ground within the church. The reforms he demanded he tried hard to practice.

The last homily he preached, in Houston three weeks

before his death, has this hard church truth once more:

What is there to rescue us from this idolatry of self and clan? Except worship, except this biblical/liturgical assembly of faith to which we here and now commit our scattered selves again?...In our tradition, God trusts us to figure out what all this means, to use our own imaginations to interpret what all this means in our time, our place, our situation. We have no party line—no political, economic, cultural, legal agenda. These things we have to figure out along with everyone else on the planet. What we have in faith and in faith's liturgy is more important: the vision that all politics, economics, culture, and law must be made to serve love and love's reconciling and liberating deeds....

In this memorial we hear the word together, whether we are rich or poor, female or male, gay or straight, of one color or another, old or young, sick or well, working or jobless, approved or disapproved by our society. All of us whom society tries to keep invisible, for appearances' sake, are made visible here, and not just visible but equal in nobility, honor, calling, love. We wash each other's feet and we share equally a common holy bread and a common holy cup not because we have earned them or are worthy of them, but because of God—blessed be God, whose overwhelming love reduces our silly little human distinctions to trivia, and allows them only because we need each other's gifts and functions to supply a wholeness we can only find together.

We are a people, a church, starved for such a liturgy, such a life. Thanks be to God for the hope and challenge and humble example that Robert Hovda was for us. May he rest in God's peace.

GABE HUCK

Gabe Huck is director of Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago.

in expanding educational choice and breaking educational monopoly financing, but no group has a greater stake than the American Catholic community. Insofar as it does not actively pursue it and insist on educational choice and a just distribution of state funds, the American Catholic community is actually betraying its obligations as a distinct element of American pluralism to speak clearly and strongly for its interests.

In addition to enlightened self-interest and knowledge of the injustice done to themselves, there is a second reality which should spur Catholics vigorously to seek educational choice. The great Catholic interest parallels an equally great national need for change. Finance monopoly in education has a deleterious impact on education itself, on its quality, and on the international competitiveness of the American educational product. It directly leads to the schools' inability to offer anything like rigorous ethical instruction or context. Public finance monopoly, moreover, is greatly responsible for escalating school costs and the property taxes which typically pay for them. And especially it deprives the poor of the freedom to educate their children in a chosen environment, a right now reserved only to those wealthy enough either to pay for it in the form of private school tuition, or to relocate to localities which provide more favorable educational experiences. Parental choice via vouchers, for example, would be the single greatest empowerment of the poor that one can imagine.

So, if Roman Catholics and their leaders would think about it, there is a powerful set of self-interest *and* general welfare political motivations calling them to join the struggle for political change in educational financing. Understandably, they should want the dollars now devoted to education to follow the parents and children to public *or* private schools of parental choice, rather than being assigned *a priori* to public institutions operating in a monopoly environment with predictably negative results.

But that is not all. Indeed, that is not what makes the issue so urgent at this time. The virtue of prudence tells responsible

people that in deciding a course of action, they not only test abstract priorities, but also feasibilities. Is there, at present, a chance for educational choice to be enacted and achieved? Have circumstances surrounding the issue changed the likelihood of its achievement, made it more possible? That feasibility assessment provides the third and clinching reason for elevating educational choice from the crowd of issues.

There is growing awareness of the many problems which flow from current policy, as described above. There is growing recognition of the inner-city crisis, and the educational crisis at its core. There is growing concern for the long-range competitiveness of the American economy, weakened by poor educational achievement. The social constituencies interested in educational change are increasing. The constitutional obstructions, by which church-state fears have been used to block government aid to students and parents who want religiously based education, are now falling. The Supreme Court's *Witters* and *Mueller* decisions of the 1980s mean, as Laurence Tribe has put it, that any decently drafted voucher plan can today pass the constitutional tests. The Bush administration encourages change and is overtly dedicated to programs of educational choice. (Let no one imagine this to be a partisan plea, for the Democrats would be most welcome to outdo Bush and company on this vital matter. Indeed, the surest way to encourage Democratic motion in that direction would be for Catholics to express their expectations.) It is these changes which, cumulatively, strongly suggest that there is today a great opportunity for effective action. If Catholics become politically engaged, and link their strength to that of the other constituencies identified above, there is an excellent chance in the next five or six years to break the public monopoly of educational financing in the fifty states, and to achieve justice for Catholics and all others, especially the poor, with a stake in educational quality.

QUENTIN L. QUADE

Quentin L. Quade is Raynor Professor of Political Science at Marquette University.

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

A MORAL COCKROACH

THE RESILIENCY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

It is difficult to know what to make of the recent upsurge in anti-Semitism. On the national level Pat Buchanan's message contains liberal doses of what might be called genteel anti-Semitism—if it were not for the fact that Pat is so lacking in gentility that nothing he has to offer, not even his anti-Semitism, can be said to be truly genteel.

In my neck of the woods, on the campus

of Brown University in Providence, there has been an outbreak of direct, explicit, and vulgar anti-Semitism. Crude and vicious graffiti (e.g., "No Jews" and "Kill the Yehud") have appeared on campus walls in the last few months. Elsewhere in Rhode Island college students are into other vices: two colleges have recently received a lot of press for their student bookmaking rings, while another (my alma

mater, alas) features students who, in classic undergraduate fashion, spend the weekend getting drunk and urinating on neighborhood lawns. But at Brown, anti-Semitism is now the vice of choice.

(In fairness, it should be noted that Brown students have recently held rallies denouncing anti-Semitism, that only a handful of student bookies have been identified at the two other colleges, and that the majority of students at my alma mater know how to use a bathroom.)

The Anti-Defamation League says that in 1991 there were 1,879 anti-Semitic incidents in the United States, a record-breaking number for the thirteen years the league has been keeping count of these things.

What is happening here?

One possibility is that increasing public

criticism of Israel in the United States has eroded the long-standing taboo against anti-Semitic expression. There is a profound difference of course between criticism of the government of Israel and anti-Semitism, but this difference is not apparent to everyone—especially not to the anti-Semite, who reasons that if criticism of Israel by the Bush administration is legitimate then his or her own anti-Semitism must be legitimate.

And of course some friends of Israel have reasoned in the same way, though with the signs changed. They have at times found it difficult to distinguish between anti-Semitism and legitimate criticism of the Israeli government; they have charged critics of Israel with the sin of anti-Semitism. By so doing they corroborate the views of the anti-Semite, who, like them, cannot distinguish between criticism and bigotry.

Another possible explanation (this is the one I favor) is that the moral subjectivism which has long been popular among Americans of the liberal persuasion is now finding radical right-wing expression. If moral values are nothing more than matters of personal preference, then what objection can anyone have if some folks prefer to be anti-Semites? If I object and say I don't approve of anti-Semitism, that I find it vile, abhorrent, etc., the anti-Semite schooled in contemporary liberal tolerance will respond: "Fine. Then you are under no obligation to be anti-Semitic. You have every right in the world to be philo-Semitic, just as we have the right to be anti-Semitic. You respect our right to our views, and we'll respect your right to your views. That's how it should be in a liberal society."

And if our anti-Semite is sufficiently *au courant* he or she might speak about the merits of "cultural diversity," explaining how anti-Semitism adds another yet colorful thread to the rich fabric of American multiculturalism.

But wait. The contemporary liberal, though broadly tolerant, does not believe that quite everything is permitted. Picking pockets is not permitted, nor is breaking legs. And why not? Because they cause direct and tangible injury to others. No matter how tolerant society may be, it cannot tolerate violation of the fundamental rules of public order; otherwise society will simply cease to exist.

But this only proves that anti-Semitic action would be wrong—for instance, beating up a Jew because he or she is a Jew or setting fire to a synagogue. But on what grounds can the moral relativist/subjectivist object to anti-Semitic sentiment or even the verbal expression of anti-Semitic sentiment?

Sociologists have a name for the

deterioration of moral rules and values; they call it anomie. How odd that cultural liberals have long felt, and continue to feel, that the growth of anomie will somehow produce a world in which individuals will be free, creative, and benevolent. Consider Weimar Germany, which was an experiment in anomie. True, it produced a certain quan-

A Roman Catholic School for Ministry



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tity of free, creative, and benevolent individuals. It also produced the Nazis.

In the nineteenth century, anarchists of the Bakunin school were criticized for having no constructive program, only a program of destruction, which was to tear down all the institutions of church and state. The anarchists responded that destruction was the only program needed. Once the ground was cleared of the ancient evils of church and state, beauty, truth, and goodness would spring spontaneously from the soil.

Our contemporary cultural liberals are

genteel and moderate anarchists. They are not so foolish as to want to destroy the state; indeed, many of them make a living working for the state. And though they have scant enthusiasm for religion, only the angry ex-Catholics among them have any objection to the continued existence of churches. Still, they are the true descendants of the old anarchists. They believe that the destruction of the idea that moral values have an objective character will somehow, as though by an invisible hand, lead to the triumph of beauty, truth, and goodness.

For many centuries anti-Semitism has demonstrated itself to be a remarkably persistent parasite, capable of hitching a ride on diametrically opposed forms of culture. It made itself completely at home in the Christian Middle Ages. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—especially in Germany, but not only in Germany—it married the modern religion of nationalism. Why should we be surprised if so durable a bug (the cockroach of the moral world) adapts itself to contemporary individualism? □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

Abigail McCarthy

THE EMPTY TUBE

TV TRASHES POLITICS

Whoever wins the Democratic nomination, whoever wins the 1992 presidential election, will have done so as the result of a political process warped almost beyond recognition. By television.

The American two-party system evolved as a means of giving practical expression to contrasting political philosophies and selecting men (later women) for office and giving them cohesive support. The primaries were part of the machinery of selection and eventually a way of giving alternative candidates a chance to be heard and elected. Originally—and not so long ago—candidates developed support state by state and came to the party convention where the final decision was made. Those state party members who chose to wait until their delegates could weigh the qualifications of each candidate in the close encounters of the convention went to them with “favorite son” candidates.

Now consider what has happened this year. As in several recent election years, the primary in New Hampshire, a small state with an electorate unrepresentative of the varied general population of the United States, assumed an abnormal importance because it was made the focus

of the news. Not only did the television news (and the print media following it) pay exaggerated attention to the New Hampshire campaigns but the major-domos of the networks decided *which candidates were viable and which were not* and allowed only those they chose to appear on their debate programs. One of the original purposes of the primary—to allow voters to appraise all those candidates legally on the ballot—was thus summarily defeated.

In addition to that arbitrary decision restricting access to the voters, the network personalities presiding over the debates decided, by their attention, which issues were important and which were not, which candidates’ proposed programs merited attention and which did not. Predictably only the most controversial piqued their interest.

(In fairness it must be said here that public television’s “MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour” did lengthy in-depth interviews with more candidates than those the commercial networks had deemed viable.)

The arbitrariness and superficiality of the news side of television has been further complicated by the television advertising which assaults viewers day and night prior to election day in each primary. The cost of this advertising is the single biggest cause

of the current outrageous cost of political campaigns and it automatically gives the edge to the candidate with the most campaign money. Not only must the harried contender spend hours of precious campaign time at fund-raising events, but this advertising has become so specialized that he or she must have the help of high-priced political consultants and public relations people who may or may not have any valid political philosophy.

The effect of advertising and the more or less disengaged public relations advisers was very evident in the pre-Super Tuesday campaigns in the South. The same television hour that showed us debating candidates greeting each other civilly and arguing the issues in a moderate reasonable manner was interspersed with slashing thirty second spots distorting opposing candidates’ positions and accusing them of “pandering” or being “un-American.” The political atmosphere, needless to say, was consequently filled with bitterness. And the end is not yet.

In short, the ultimate effect of television on politics has been to make the party system meaningless, to make a telegenic appearance more important than character, to raise the power of money in political choice, and to debase the level of debate.

This is only one of the more obvious of the effects of television on society. In its recent book-length report on five years of research on the impact of television on society the American Psychological Association concluded that “the major flaw in American broadcasting is that commercial television must generate revenue through programming that attracts large, heteroge-

neous, affluent audiences which do not represent the majority of viewers."

The report also endorsed most of the recent research on the effects of television: that, for example, the constant portrayal of violence leads to the acceptance of violence and antisocial behavior and that the portrayal of sexual violence in particular "leads to the increased acceptance of rape."

What can be done to reverse the negative effects of television? The Psychological Association advocates government support for noncommercial outlets. Its task force called on the Federal Communications Commission to return to the principle of the Communications Act of 1934 which said that, to keep their licenses, broadcasters must serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity. (This principle has been more or less abandoned in the deregulatory atmosphere of the Reagan and Bush administrations.)

Dean George Gerbner of the Annenberg School of Communications recently told the first meeting of the Association for Communications and Theological Education at Yale Divinity School that it is time for religious groups to help people regain control of the words and images that make life meaningful. Television and other forms of electronic media slice through churches and schools and into the home. It has become, he said, our "cradle-to-the-grave value system." In consequence Americans get their ideas of how they should live from television. He explained: "Commercial stories say this, 'Here are your choices and this is what we recommend.... Try it. You'll like it. And if you like it, that's all there is to it. That's all you need to ask. Don't ask how your choice will affect other people.... The more satisfying something is, the more you want it and soon you are addicted. That's how instant gratification works.... Children are not told their stories by someone who has something to tell,' he said. 'They are told their stories by someone who has something to sell.' Gerbner admitted that it was, on the face of it, impossible to shake the foundations of the commercial culture but he urged religious groups to call for change. "If it wasn't impossible," he said, "it wouldn't be worth trying."

Still another effort to counter the effects

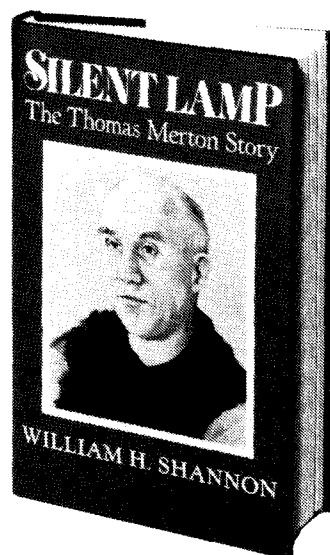
of television were described, interestingly enough, on ABC's "Nightly News" on March 3. The segment dealt with the work of Professor Robert Kubey at Rutgers on how to teach TV through communications courses in the nation's schools. Most Western nations have some form of this teaching, it was reported, and an example was shown of a course in television watching in an Ontario, Canada, school. Students were encouraged to ask what the intended effect of a program was, why certain news stories were chosen over others,

etc. They were also given the experience of constructing a program within a time frame.

One can be grateful that there is increasing recognition of the problem and one can hope that the approaches outlined above will be successful in controlling this powerful medium and making it a force for good in society. But in a nation where a generation has spent up to eight hours a day passively absorbing the present TV offerings, it is possible to wonder if we have waited too long. □

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TRUE MULTICULTURALISM

ROBERT HASSENGER

SETTING NO BOUNDARIES

Higher education continues to reap the effects of the social reforms of the sixties and seventies, both encouraging and discouraging. More students, from a wider range of backgrounds, are going to college. With this wider range of students, the call for “cultural diversity” has properly meant a heightened concern for multicultural perspectives in the curriculum. But, not so properly, it has also sometimes come to mean, with the rise of “multiculturalism,” a subordination of academic to political concerns. Earlier, campus protesters were primarily students, with some faculty supporters. Their demand—for civil rights or against the Vietnam War—was to extend the basic rights and responsibilities of the democratic heritage, insisting upon a reconciliation of the ideals of Western civilization with the practices of that civilization as they knew it. Now, many of the protesters are on the faculty, and the enemy is not government or business, but the “canon” of Western civilization.

How does the curriculum get involved? At least some of the appeal of the ideology of multiculturalism is that it serves a different kind of “victim’s” revolution on campus. Enter those who insist that Western culture is inherently hostile to women, blacks and other minorities, and homosexuals. It is “institutionally” racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, ageist, ableist, speciesist, and looksist. And enter those who offer a new “discipline,” one that invalidates the knowledge and methods of those in tenured teaching positions, who are unable to deconstruct, revolutionize, or de-phallogocentrize the curriculum.

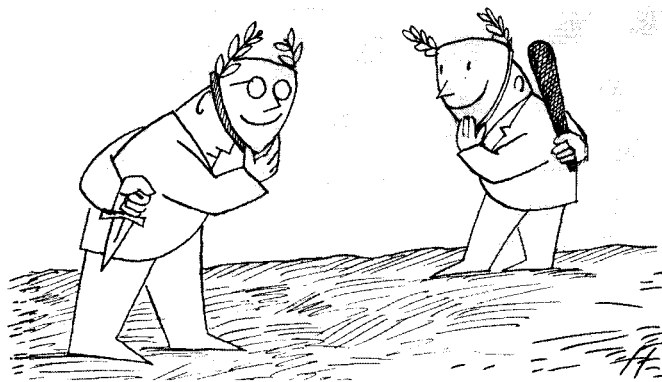
In the deconstructionists’ indeterminacy of meaning lies the future for those who feel “uncomfortable”: we seem to have a *politics of identity* for those who feel excluded, either from “representation” in a curriculum that purportedly reflects only the work of DWEMs (dead, white, European males); or from “representation” on the faculty, because only those who have “experienced” the sexism, racism, etc. of the culture can really teach about it. “True diversity” for many multiculturalists means that gender and ethnicity must match the fields in which the new

orthodoxy is taught, because a scholar’s race and sex must be *correctly* brought to bear on the subject.

These new critics aspire not only to deconstruct, but to engage in “restitutive criticism,” to restore the voices of those who feel—and feeling sometimes seems a principal criterion—alienated, by drawing upon the guilt of the white liberal. (They do not seem to recognize that even the appeal to liberal guilt is a peculiarly Western phenomenon, and that the very idea of oppression is grounded in Western categories of thought, as the sociologist Andrew Hacker has noted.)

So “multiculturalism” is too often neither “multi” nor “cultural.” It stands for a new ideology that discourages—even punishes—critical analysis. If one opposes the view that, say, the Western “canon” must be thrown out as “an exercise in colonization,” he (this is easier with males, preferably white, but see Stephen Carter’s *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*) is charged with being racist, sexist, homophobic. Intimidation and epithet have replaced rational argument. Those who play this game are able to immunize themselves from criticism through the revisionist position that all thought is political. To “dialogue” with them is to accept their premises.

An honest intellectual perspective, however, would certainly take into account the social and historical forces that have shaped all expressions of culture—including the *au courant*. Of course power has determined the received wisdom of any society or cultural tradition. Of course reality is socially constructed, and knowledge is power: what is produced and/or recorded at a given



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time is in part a function of who had the power, and reflects certain shared ideological biases. But this need not force us into a Foucauldian reductionism that would dismiss the contributions of the Western tradition, or of individual intellect and imagination.

As Kenneth B. Clark pointed out in *Pathos of Power*, political, economic, and social egalitarianism should not invade the areas of intellect and aesthetics. Social inequalities cannot be overcome and remedied by changing the curriculum—or by blaming differences in academic performance on “institutional” racism, sexism, and the like. We need to understand our failures, not to explain them away. Not everyone, black or white, male or female, begins with the same advantages, preparation, and talent as others. They should not be expected to be equally successful in college—or after. To pretend so, and to use differential criteria of success in evaluating their academic work, is a cruel hoax. There is room for compassion and sensitivity; but these need not altogether replace the expectation of competence.

A curriculum for the emerging multicultural community, and one that would be more useful for historically disenfranchised students, would examine the relationships of power to belief, thought, and artistic expression in every society. But a multicultural perspective should not mean some kind of proportional representation, reading lists by head count, a kind of intellectual affirmative action. To suggest that such DWEMs as Plato and Sartre, Aquinas and Freud, Locke and Nietzsche are speaking with one voice because of their sex, race, and class is nonsense, and indeed betrays a woeful ignorance of the sociohistorical process.

We *should* study such phenomena as the rise of capitalism in Japan and the persistence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism in the West as well as the East, the destruction of the Aztec empire and the cultures of the native North Americans. But we cannot be hampered in our quest by sacrificing the tools of critical thinking in order to avoid someone’s feelings of alienation, of being “disrespected.”

If we are to examine the instances of cruelty and exploitation in the Greco-Roman, Judaic and Christian traditions, we cannot be expected to look only at the achievements of third-world cultures, but not at their shortcomings as well. To explain away all fanaticism and oppression by rationalizations that rob these cultures of their complexities is condescending and patronizing.

True multiculturalism would set no boundaries by gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, political orientation, or class origins. And we must be consistent: if using academic criteria for determining what “should” be taught means one can be charged with “uniculturalism” (for which read racism/sexism), then dialogue is impossible. Students need to learn how to make judgments based upon intellectually defensible standards, not conformity to what is ideologically correct at a given time. To make our decisions by application of the principle of least offense is to distort free inquiry, and to do a disservice to those who are already spending more energy celebrating their victimhood than overcoming it, as Stephen Carter, Shelby Steele, Glenn Loury, Thomas Sowell, and other African-Americans have recently been pointing out.

If we are guilty of ethnocentrism and prejudice, the way to educate ourselves and our students is to *engage* these, by drawing upon all available resources. Ethnocentrism is portrayed exquisitely

ly by the DWEM who wrote *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Does this mean that only a white male of European extraction can teach these? Would his Jewishness add to or subtract from his “objectivity,” his ability to assure that Shakespeare is being taught as he “felt”? Even to address such questions is ludicrous. The result can be a *reductio ad absurdum*: Western sieve replaces Western Civ. in Jacques Barzun’s turn of phrase.

Perversely, by insisting upon the “experiential” criterion for all, we are led to question how women can teach Shakespeare, or blacks, Melville. It is ironic that some of the victims of the new provincialism are those who have been most discriminated against. A black American should not be made to feel guilty because she wants to study the Renaissance, or the Chicago novel, rather than to specialize in African-American literature, as some are told they have a “responsibility” to do.

Decisions about academic matters have to be made on scholarly, not political, grounds. The aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their educations. We should not wish to indoctrinate, but to invite students to join the conversation. Our obligation is to help them to learn how to learn, and this does not mean inculcating a political position that we have decided our students “need.” Teachers should constructively challenge the thinking—indeed, even the “sensibilities”—of college students. Multiculturalism is to be welcomed, if it means scholarship about those things which have been foolishly ignored or relegated to the second-rate. Certainly there are social and historical reasons why almost all influential economists, say, have been white males; and these should be explored. But race and sex are insufficient grounds for excluding these scholars from the curriculum, and to do so does a disservice to the values of inquiry and objectivity. When our students’ intellectual commitments come into conflict with our or their political sympathies, we should explore *why*. We should “teach the conflicts,” as the philosopher Richard Rorty has argued, not compromise scholarship by ideology. The very respect for diversity and for reasoned argument come out of the Western tradition.

What of the charge that we are “imposing a certain worldview”? There are a couple of immediate rejoinders: (1) how could we not? All education “imposes” values. Even teaching children to read and write is a choice, reflecting a worldview; (2) so are you: we cannot avoid being captives of our epistemologies.

Choices about the curriculum will be the locus of many conflicts. But these can be constructive. The tensions between community and difference—otherness—can be confronted in the curriculum. More students would be better off for learning what it is like to be female, or black, or gay (or white or male, for that matter). And this can be done without confining ourselves and our students to authors and books that pass ideological muster, or which must be taught by “representatives” of everyone who can fit her position on a placard, or capture it in a sound bite. Most of us have syncretistic identities, belonging to more than one culture. The curriculum can be enlarged to include these. Perhaps it must be. But our students’ minds should not be coerced into correspondence with some socially constructed reality. □

Nancy Parke

Sister Mary Harmonica in Transit

WHOMP face down on the chancery carpet can
not draw a breath
ribs won't expand
inside this iron band
what is this, death or
something
blue
and broken
like
the frames
of my
bifocals
blue
bells
cockleshells
easy isey o
ver

I've done this before
bailing out of the swings
bombs over Tokyo
landed on my stomach
couldn't breathe for
ever fifth grade Saint
Bridget's playground gravel
under my chin and

I went down town
to see Mr. Brown
he gave me a nickel
to buy a pickle

They're jumping over there.
Public school kids.

Slobs. No uniforms. Look at those
run-over heels. Trashy pink shoes.

Not last night
but the night before
twenty-four robbers came
knocking at my door

That tall girl with the curls
thinks she's something
the way she runs in

Mabel Mabel
set the table
don't forget the

RED HOT PEPPER
fifteen is all she jumped
I can do sixty
I'm getting in line cause
I'm the jumprope queen
look at these kids all
Mex and Filipino
that's the trouble
with California
of Saint Bridget's
My God they let BOYS jump here
dirty Micks
dirty Micks
always bragging
about their dicks
and that kid that's turning
has to be a retard
but now they're jumping
my kind of rope
I'm a little Dutch girl
dressed in blue
here are the things
I've learned to do
salute to the captain
bow to the queen
and turn my back
on the submarine
and when it's my turn I'll show them
how a Catholic girl jumps
not like this one
down in the valley
where the green grass grows
she's getting boobs
and they bounce
Catholic girls never jump rope
once they get boobs it's
an occasion of sin
she sang and she sang
and she sang so sweet
Marguerite
go wash your feet
the board of health
is across the street
You can't change rhymes like that
it's against the rules
THESE KIDS DON'T KNOW ANYTHING

ha ha you missed
 now it's the fat boy's turn
 just wait till it's mine and
 Sally drank some lemonade
 Sally drank some beer
 Sally drank some everything
 that made her feel so queer
 up came the lemonade
 up came the beer
 he is pretty good for a fat boy but
 Sally called the doctor
 Sally called the nurse
 Sally called the lady with the alligator purse
 IN came the doctor
 I hope you die tall girl
 IN came the nurse
 ha ha Miss Priss missed
 IN came

THE LADY WITH THE ALLIGATOR PURSE!

Where did SHE come from?
 She's real
 she's here
 in her dark blue suit
 She's jumping rope
 swinging that alligator purse and
 springing up from those alligator shoes
 double dutch and
 red hot peppers
 and now she's juggling
 her alligator purse and shoes
 and jumping four no eight
 ropes at once
 Is this somebody's mother?
 She's jumping as high as
 the chain link fence
 She's got GREAT BIG TITS
 rocking on her chest
 as she points her stocking toes
 and skips that spinning whirl of ropes
 and juggles shoes
 and alligator purse
 and everything that was inside it
 alligators
 giraffes
 and trees and bees
 minnows and cliffs
 and calls kids in

to jump with her
 One by one
 they run in
 no one misses
 how many kisses
 will she receive
 they are jumping as high
 as she is
 to plant big smackers
 on her face
 the retard is whirling
 a thousand ropes at once
 and she is laughing at them all
 with eyes of love while
 the tall girl and the fat boy
 grab hands and start
 another rhyme
 my soul doth
 magnify
 the Lord
 and I know that fat boy:
 Thomas Aquinas
 from the oil on
 the chancery wall
 holy Mary mother of God
 a gavotte is what
 you call this jumping
 and the golden man
 with holes in his hands
 who turns the ropes
 O Marguerite
 go wash your feet
 the one you love
 is across the street
 and I know
 I know
 I know
 I am a little cardboard
 measuring stick
 with all wrong numbers
 like this one by my nose on the carpet
 who has never loved enough
 and God yells to me
 Get in here
 and I run in.

THE COLLEGE MOLD DOESN'T HOLD



A new book reminds us of the illusory nature of attitude change on campus. Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, following in the tradition of earlier studies, have summarized the massive but not very conclusive research on students in *How College Affects Students* (Jossey-Bass, 1991). Their survey of 2,600 studies carried out over the last two decades on American

But when it comes to attitudes and values, the evidence is less persuasive. For example, the new Pascarella and Terenzini study notes that, on the following items: social liberalism, political liberalism, civil rights and liberties, secularism, and modern gender roles, the net effects of college on attitudes and values are either unclear or small. But these are precisely the areas which are so bitterly contested today. If a wealth of evidence shows that over the past two decades a college education has not greatly affected the attitudes and values of students, perhaps educators are spending too much time on attempting to manipulate the curriculum with the idea of changing attitudes. We should remember that the much-studied women from Bennington College, who were saturated with New Deal ideas in the 1930s, were not discernibly different when compared with their sisters and other close relatives a decade later. Spouses and children,

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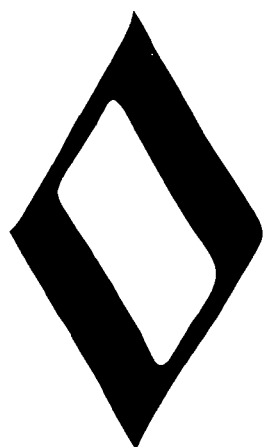
community activities, and social class were clearly more salient than vaguely remembered Keynesian theory and liberal ideas imbibed on campus.

All this leaves us with several important questions. Why do the attitudes and values of students change over time? Why has there been a deterioration in racial and ethnic relations? And what should the academic community do to improve the present problematical situation? Clearly, there are differences in college students over time. During the 1960s, students became more liberal and their choice of majors reflected a concern with social activism and service. For example, classes in sociology were full and faculties doubled or tripled in size. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, students of the "me-generation" flocked to fields such as law and business, fields that would yield high incomes. Service-related majors or those majors which did not promise instant economic gratification languished.

Student generations change because young people are affected by the same societal trends and conditions as the rest of the population. After the 1960s, students were buffeted by the economic uncertainties and declining job market of the 1970s; in the 1980s they were affected by the conservative ethos and instant gratification of the Reagan years. It is not surprising that the campus felt the influence of these basic economic and social factors. In the past few years, cutbacks in higher education and

a tough job market have led to worries on campus. Further, "Willie Hortonism" has combined with real fears and tensions to produce a deterioration in campus race relations. Moreover, opposition in high places to affirmative action, quotas, and other efforts to ensure racial equality, as well as recent decisions by the Supreme Court have all signaled significant change. It is becoming more respectable in American society to blame minority groups not only for society's ills but also for one's own individual problems. In colleges and universities across the country, many white students see affirmative action and other programs favoring minorities as hurting themselves—a zero-sum game. They feel threatened by admissions programs that seem to favor someone else; they believe that the bulk of student aid is going to others more favorably placed. Not surprisingly, many college students buy into these new attitudes and values. They learn them at home and believe them before attending their first college lecture.

What, then, should colleges and universities do? The effort to marry the curriculum to social and attitudinal change would seem to be fruitless. The debate about the curriculum should be based on questions about what knowledge is intrinsically important and what is useful in an increasingly complex and technologically oriented society. What is worth knowing? What do we need to know? Perhaps the "core curriculum" proponents who devised the Chicago "Great Books" program or the Columbia general education core were right. They focused on what they felt was important to learn. It should be kept in mind that these



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core programs were not static—they changed as ideas about knowledge expanded and society presented new challenges. Thus, a broadened concept of the role of minorities in American life and a multicultural approach to history and society would not be inimical to a coherent curriculum.

Our point is that American higher education has been led astray by the idea that the curriculum, the impact of professors, and the “collegiate experience” change attitudes. The evidence shows that these do not significantly alter student ideologies; it is a conceit to believe otherwise. Once this is recognized, the heat can be lowered on the curriculum debate. Political correctness will lose much of its salience and the Right will be able to stop worrying about students being brainwashed. We can focus on what is important.

Improved race relations and a greater degree of tolerance on campus will not come from restricting freedom of expression or mandatory human relations courses. American colleges and universities are an integral part of American society: so far as there are social, racial, and economic tensions in society, these will be reflected on campus. How could it be otherwise? The best that higher education can do is to ensure a stimulating environment for learning, study, and research. □

SCREEN

OFF KEY & ON

‘VENUS’ & ‘HEAR MY SONG’

Meeeting *Venus* is a beautifully detailed film but only its details work. This movie is like a lecturer who can’t defend his thesis coherently but who so entertains his audience with delightful anecdotes that he wins himself a lot of good will.

A middle-aged Hungarian conductor named Santos, a musician’s musician rather than an international superstar, is summoned to Paris to conduct *Tannhäuser* for the “Opera Europa” (read Paris Opera). Used to the factory-like conditions of a pre-1989 Communist arts apparatus, Santos is soon up to his neck in the dither, dross, and occasional gratifications of democracy. Orchestra members appear and disappear according to the vagaries of union contract clauses instead of the needs of the production; the opera house’s two impresarios scheme against each other, using Santos as a pawn; singers are on the make, professionally and sexually, and Santos himself becomes embroiled in a love affair with his star soprano that threatens to wreck his marriage.

Writer-director Istvan Szabo, himself Hungarian, is a masterful, wonderfully sardonic observer of how individuals interact with, struggle against, do or don’t survive under powerful organizations. Santos (played by Niels Arestrup with both force and subtlety) is neither worm nor schemer. He is an artist trying to create under conditions that are very strange for him. And the first third of

Meeting Venus is exhilaratingly and painfully funny as Santos, a grown-up Alice, moves through the curiouiser and curiouiser Wonderland of an art world that is both state-sponsored and capitalistic. The directorial inventions are as acute as the skill with which the actors fulfill them: Santos, demanding his salary from a particularly malevolent backstage bureaucrat, must bend to speak under a glass partition that screens the paymaster’s office; so, even when he tries to argue his case firmly, he is physically bowing to the little god of the account books. A rehearsal pianist, profusely apologizing that union rules prevent him from granting the conductor much needed rehearsal time, simultaneously locks the piano so that Santos can’t play it either. A globe-trotting tenor (fine comic performance by Jay O. Sanders), given his blocking by the director, identifies each move with one of the many *Tannhäuser* productions he’s already done. Director: “Move downstage on that phrase.” Tenor: “Great! That’s how we did it in San Francisco!” Director: “Now sing the rest of the aria kneeling.” Tenor: “Berlin! I love it! I love it! Berlin was a wonderful production!”

If such were the sum of *Meeting Venus*, it would be one of the best comic tributes to the theatrical life ever filmed. But, Szabo, alas, has higher ambitions and the middle third of this movie sinks under those ambitions. They are summed up by the movie’s title. You may recall that *Tannhäuser* is about a poet-knight who experiences poetry-inspiring passion in the arms of the goddess Venus but finds his position in an orderly, Christian, family-oriented society undermined by his forbidden knowledge. Szabo tries to create a neat parallel to the myth with his modern story. Santos is supposed to be a *Tannhäuser* with a nice doctor-wife and daughter waiting for him back in Budapest, while his soprano-mistress, played by Glenn Close, is meant to be his Venus, erotically inspiring the conductor to the heights of art but also destroying his happy bourgeois marriage.

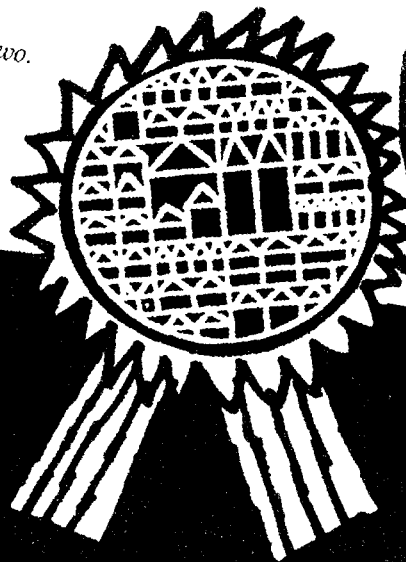
The parallel just doesn’t work. For one thing, *Tannhäuser* lived in a homogeneous society. His songs earned him a death sentence because they proved he had lain with Venus, a definite no-no for any Christian knight. But Santos lives in the globe-trotting, ethnically diverse and ethically relaxed world of international opera production and the denizens of that world not only don’t condemn him for his extramarital affair, they show him a tolerance bordering on indifference. And why shouldn’t they? They’re all having affairs of their own! True, Santos’s wife is ready to show him the door, but her rage isn’t inspired by any Venusian influence. She’s just a wife who’s been betrayed once too often. (The film makes it clear that Santos has had other liaisons.) This marital blow-up would have taken place if Santos had been an adulterous doctor, lawyer, or truck driver. It has no bearing on his profession and does not fulfill the putative theme of the film.

Second, Glenn Close, fine actress though she is, cannot radiate and overwhelm as her character must if the love story is to make any sense. (This soprano is the type that turns cautious men into midnight door-batterers who must be carted off by hotel security.) Close is versatile enough to play both psychotics (*Fatal Attraction*) and salt-of-the-earth paragons (*Sarah, Plain and Tall*), but theater-animal imperiousness à la Maria Callas is simply not in her line.

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But, in the last half hour, by focusing once again on the politics of theater production and scanting romance, *Meeting Venus* revives. The opera's opening night is portrayed with suspense and wit, but it's too bad that Szabo couldn't resist a parting allegorical touch: when Santos conducts the closing notes of Wagner's work, his baton flowers just as Tannhäuser's staff flowers under the blessing of God. But Tannhäuser is saved by the intercession of his dead fiancée while Santos gets his show on the road only with a lot of hard work and some pretty slick finessing of union regulations. It is Santos's job to conduct heavenly choruses but I wish his creator, Istvan Szabo, would keep his feet on the ground.

Peter Chelsom, the writer-director of the new Irish comedy, *Hear My Song*, doesn't have to keep his feet on the ground. He's a cloudwalker of the utmost agility. It's no use detailing his movie's plot, for the script is a piece of deliberate nonsense about a young concert promoter's search for a famous tenor who has become a recluse after a traumatic brush with the law. After some mishaps on the road, the hero's sidekick mutters, "We're in a shaggy dog story." Indeed, so is the movie's audience but such is the powerful gaiety of Chelsom's direction that it would take a very dull and overly rationalistic creature to wish himself anywhere else while watching this giddy pipedream.

Chelsom's style is hard to describe because it reconciles so many opposites. His way of staging pub brawls and hijinks is so corny that I'm tempted to think that Chelsom has simply seen too many John Ford movies. Yet he is also capable of staging a slapstick scene, involving a cow and the deepest well in Ireland, that incorporates so many colliding elements of farce, fantasy, and downright terror that you don't know whether to laugh or rise screaming from your seat or do both simultaneously.

There has not been a comedy director since Keaton who has dared to allow as much beauty of landscape and climate into his work as Chelsom has because scenic beauty gorgeously photographed tends to distract the viewer from whatever is funny, but Chelsom, like Keaton, manages to make the very beauty of the backgrounds part of the film's humor. It's as if the grandeur of Irish cliffs and the jeweled opacity of Irish mists had rendered the inhabitants slaphappy. And, while the motivations of Chelsom's characters seem transparent, the director has a way of allowing them little moments of stillness, meditation, or the closeness of nature (as when the hero, after a brush with death, lies on his back and gazes up at the stars until an ecstatic smile suffuses his face) that keep us wondering if we really do understand these people after all.

The climax of the movie, the return of the legendary singer, Josef Locke, to the stage under the aegis of the hero actually accomplishes what the equivalent moment in *Meeting Venus* (Tannhäuser's opening) flubs: a demonstration of how art touches the lives of audience members with magic. When Ned Beatty as Locke (voice dubbed by Vernon Midgley) sings an English translation of "Return to Sorrento," you can see and feel each member of the audience focusing so intently on him that the

performance seems to be becoming a beautiful memory even as you watch it. That flower that blossoms on the conductor's baton at the end of *Venus* rightfully belongs in the band of Josef Locke's wide-brimmed hat. In his daffy, artfully artless way, Peter Chelsom captures the unquenchable implication that resides at the heart of all great performances: Your life has not yet surrendered to you its final revelation.

RICHARD ALLEVA

STAGE

COMING APART

'MARRIAGE' & 'SARAH & ABRAHAM'

Plays by Marsha Norman and Edward Albee, not yet performed in New York, have recently had premieres elsewhere along the Amtrak line—Norman's *Sarah and Abraham* at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, Albee's *Marriage Play* at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton. *Marriage Play*, a co-production with the Alley Theatre in Houston, directed by the author, is the American premiere of a work first performed at Vienna's English Theatre in 1987. It is a long, one-act play in which Jack's announcement that he is leaving Gillian—delivered three times after repeated entrances—is the trigger for a two-character conversation about a marriage that for thirty years has survived infidelity, familiarity, and boredom.

In a note in the program Albee makes a point of disassociating *Marriage Play* from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in response to the people, whoever they are, who ask if Jack and Gillian are "like George and Martha." Of course, they are not, and the differences are a lot more central to the two plays than are the cosmetic ones Albee mentions. George and Martha live in an identifiable context and share a marriage that is as fulfilling as it is destructive; even their imaginary child has more substance than the children of Jack and Gillian, who exist only in one line of the play. Jack and Gillian have no context except the playing space—a minimally furnished elegant white set by Derek McLane—and the marriage, about which we hear a great deal, is little more than a verbal construct. Jack and Gillian seem much closer to Tobias and Agnes in *A Delicate Balance*, but their "suburban home" is farther along the road away from the verisimilitude that shares space with the dramatic metaphor of *Virginia Woolf* than the more accurately labeled "suburban house" of *Balance*. Tobias and Agnes have relatives and neighbors and a sense of dis-ease that makes their anguish less hermetic than the conversation pit of *Marriage Play*.

There are occasional echoes of *Virginia Woolf* in *Marriage Play*; Gillian's sad wife-sad husband speech recalls, to the marked disadvantage of the later play, Martha's repeated, "George and Martha: sad, sad, sad." Jack and Gillian—particularly Gillian—tease the language, worrying over the correct word,

the correct pronunciation, the correct sentence structure, as though style were all, but there is nothing in *Marriage Play* to equal the precision of Agnes's opening speech in *A Delicate Balance*.

I can imagine Albee grumpily wondering why I insist on talking about his other plays when I am ostensibly reviewing *Marriage Play*. So what do we have here? Two performers wander restlessly around the stage, approaching and withdrawing from one another, until their two characters settle on a sturdy coffee table and join hands. There are some funny lines, some brief rhetorical niceties, an occasional extended aria (Gillian's fiction about the artist who killed himself for love of her), and it is easy to listen to since Albee writes listenable lines. But it is essentially pedestrian and—in terms of plot and character—does not add up to much. Jack is a wimp, wimpily played by Tom Klunis; Shirley Knight's Gillian is much more forceful. She has a speech in which she catalogues her wifely duties which include comforting him when he needs it, and the final joining of hands may be seen as more of the same—her consoling him on the fact that his declaration of revolutionary escape is never more than empty words. A good bad marriage, barely sustained again, in the best Albee tradition? Perhaps, but he did name his characters Jack and Jill and the intended image may be of their forever falling down hill, the pail always waterless.

Sarah and Abraham is also about a marriage coming apart, but there is much more than that to the play. Too much, perhaps. It takes place in a regional theater, not quite the Actors Theatre of Louisville, which commissioned the play and first presented it in some form although the George Street production is billed as a world premiere. The fictional theater is an improvisational one in which the company, with the help of a biblical expert, is working-up the story of Sarah and Abraham, and in which the private lives of the performers echo those of the characters they play. Sarah, the sustaining presence in the theater,

loses Abraham, her ambitious husband, to Hagar, a former company member come back from Hollywood success to play this role. The director is God, of course, and also the father of the child which Sarah chooses to have at the expense of a chance for success in New York. Although she is hardly as old as the barren Sarah was when she bloomed and gave birth to Isaac, the actress is presumably at a last-chance age. It is probably an unnecessary quibble to point out that an engagement in the regional-theater series at the Joyce, which is where they are booked, is not likely to ring bells in New York for this biblical folderol—judging by what we see of it—let alone make a star of Abraham.

Norman has a number of ideas afloat and afoot in *Sarah and Abraham*. The biblical story, as we get it here, defines Sarah as the power figure in the community, the priest of a matriarchal religion which is replaced by the traditional Hebrew one when Abraham—just a Jewish businessman until then—becomes a patriarch when he is willing to kill Isaac at God's command. Similarly, the actor, who has always been a minor figure alongside his wife, attains stature through the director's demands on him, and is presumably ready for the success in the big world that his wife foregoes. There are feminist overtones in the momentary alliance of Sarah and Hagar, or the performers who play them, against Abraham and God, or the actor and the director, but there is an antifeminist suggestion in the assumption that a woman is wisest to give up priestly power or theatrical fame to bear a child. Although the serious intentions of the play are obvious from the beginning, the play works best in the first act when the role-performer connections are largely comic. In the second act, the device becomes ponderous, Sarah and Abraham never achieving the transcendence that the play requires. That may have been partly the fault of the performers in the production I saw (Tovah Feldshuh and William Katt), but, despite my admiration for Norman as playwright, I suspect that the problem is in the script itself.

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Memory & redemption

Michael Kammen has written invaluable books, almost a dozen all told, about early American thought and institutions and, more recently, about the ways in which Americans have understood their Constitution and their history. A pathfinder in the paradoxes of American culture, Kammen has an ear as sensitive to silence as to sound, a thoroughgoing appreciation of plurality and complexity. His erudition and his fidelity to detail can be a little daunting—no risk of overlooking the trees in Kammen’s forest—but his writings are always warmed by his warts-and-all love for the place, and *Mystic Chords of Memory* has a lambency of its own.

In this book, Kammen is concerned with public memory, the ways in which Americans have remembered the past, a story in which myths and legends have as much place as history and high culture. Intellectuals and scholars claim Kammen’s attention chiefly when they affect popular remembrance, as thinkers like Bancroft and Hawthorne did in that earlier time when serious reading counted for more than it does nowadays. In the 1920s and ‘30s, critics like H.L. Mencken and Stuart Sherman still have important roles in Kammen’s account, but since 1945, intellectuals are lucky to get bit parts. Even so, Kammen may give contemporary culture a higher tone than it deserves: although Kammen recognizes the power of the visual media, his discussion of the impact of movies and television on public memory is relatively brief, focused on a few monuments like *Gone with the Wind* and “Roots,” and on historical presentations, rather narrowly defined. And inevitably, even in a book as big as this one, some people and events get left out: I missed Helen Hunt Jackson, for example, and her wonderfully tacky *Ramona*. Yet all in all, this is a remarkable book, and Kammen weaves patriotic oratory and memorials,

MYSTIC CHORDS OF MEMORY

Michael Kammen

Alfred A. Knopf, \$40, 864 pp.

Wilson Carey McWilliams

pageants and expositions, Charles Lummis and Zora Neale Hurston, Greenfield Village, Williamsburg, and Knott’s Berry Farm into a grand tapestry of reminiscence.

In the United States, Kammen argues, the effort to define, preserve, and instill public memory has characteristically been decentralized, diffuse, ad hoc, relatively noncoercive and—for most of our history—in private hands. Diversity has been a hallmark; national traditions have been ranged against the particular traditions of locality, ethnicity, religion, and class. Similarly, American culture continues to be paradoxical, admiring success but cherishing the memory of noble defeats, remembering the Alamo better than San Jacinto.

Nevertheless, as Kammen recognizes, tradition and memory involve efforts to separate the essential from the accidental in the lives of individuals and peoples, implicit attempts to answer the question of identity, pursuits of the one that unites the many. If Kammen’s comparisons to the experiences of other societies indicate that the United States is further from uniqueness than we sometimes imagine, he also reminds us that American traditions are at least unusual in the extent to which they are conscious constructions. Critical to the memory of most of us is the knowledge of having come from somewhere else, a difference which separates us from Native Americans—also immigrants, but so long ago that they lack the memory of it. Especially given our diversity, the construction of American life and politics demands the lessening of ethnic and religious rival-

ries and resentments, and hence the abandonment of much of our ancient heritages. In the beginning, as Kammen notes, Americans shared hopes more than memories, and many of our institutions aimed to depoliticize the past by deprecating memory.

Even then, Kammen observes, a “vocal minority” argued that popular wisdom is empirical and retrospective, so that a democracy without memory is at the mercy of elites and of change. Fear of a “holocaust” of the past inspired Hawthorne’s effort to create a distinctively American and republican mythology, along with the more whimsical attempt—by Longfellow and Cooper, for example—to assimilate the Indian to American myth in the hope of acquiring a shadow of autochthony. From 1870-1915, stimulated by the Civil War, the “party of memory” acquired ascendancy. History became a civil religion, a surrogate for older faith, inculcated through required classes in U.S. history and proclaiming the tradition of progress celebrated in the great expositions. From 1915-45, traditionalism, challenged by modernism, showed great vitality in new forms like the interest in folk culture. Since 1945, however, a sense of nostalgia and an obsession with “heritage” has been combined with “amnesia and historical ignorance” and an increase in both the role of government (a fairly constant tendency in Kammen’s account) and commercialization. Kammen sees bright spots, but his vision of the present stresses the leveling of the hierarchies of memory, so that Graceland and Cooperstown become indistinguishable from Mt. Vernon and Independence Hall.

Recalling the teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov—“remembrance is the secret of redemption”—Kammen argues that conflicting accounts of the past, competing in a marketplace of memories, are most

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conducive to true recollection. By contrast, the desire for reconciliation tempts us to leave the blood and folly in the attic, like the post-Civil War reunion of the Blue and the Gray at the expense of the black, or the portrait of Dr. King as the champion of civil rights and nonviolence, but not as the critic of rock music, economic inequality, and the Vietnam War. Reducing our history to one-dimensional commonalities, the yen for reconciliation takes away the light along with the dark corners, and Kammen, a partisan of memory against amnesia, wants to be sure we hear all of the counterpoint of American experience.

This emphasis on variations, however, can come close to drowning out the theme of the American composition. G.K. Chesterton remarked that the American project of "making a new nation literally out of any old nation that comes along" is incomprehensible without reference to the principle of equality, regarded not merely as one story among many, but as the human truth. Kammen takes his title from Lincoln, who understood that better than most. Yet in the text, Kammen claims that Lincoln "echoed" Madison's rhetoric in the fourteenth and fifty-first *Federalist Papers*. Now while Madison did speak of the "chords of affection," in these passages he made no mention of memory, and far from calling on the "better angels of our nature," as Lincoln did, Madison contended that angels are no model for human government. Far more than Madison, in other words, Lincoln turned to the past and to the spirit. In the same way, although Lincoln, as Kammen notes, did reject some of the "dogmas of the past" in proclaiming a "new birth of freedom," he revered the Declaration of Independence as the Union's indispensable foundation. The Declaration, in turn, rests on an appeal to meta-memory—to the Creator and to nature, the first principles of first things. These days, when American political identity seems more and more in question, lacking even the coherence of a common enemy, we have every need of that high remembrance. □

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SCHOOLS OF SCANDAL

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES

Jonathan Kozol

Crown Publishers, \$20, 262 pp.

Barbara Roche

In 1988, Jonathan Kozol began a two-year journey, visiting schools and talking with school children in approximately thirty neighborhoods in cities throughout the U.S. He shares his journey with us in *Savage Inequalities*. What he found, "a remarkable degree of racial segregation that persisted almost everywhere," startled him. That racial segregation, combined with stark economic inequity, Kozol says, creates a dual society in public education in America.

The descriptions of the neighborhoods and the schools Kozol visited are almost numbing. In East St. Louis, high schools have to be closed when sewage flows into the kitchens and the student bathrooms; in Chicago, pencils, paper, and crayons are rationed, beginning in January; in New York, four kindergartens and a sixth-grade class of Spanish-speaking children are packed into a single, windowless room; in Camden, New Jersey, teachers do not have books for half the children in their classes. "Looking around some of these inner-city schools, where filth and disrepair were worse than anything I'd seen in 1964, I often wondered why we would agree to let our children go to school in places where no politician, school board president, or business CEO would dream

of working," says Kozol.

Kozol shows us again and again how these conditions affect the children. "Most adolescents in the poorest neighborhoods learn very soon that they are getting less than children in the wealthier school districts." He writes, "about injustice most poor children in America cannot be fooled." Dr. Lillian Parks, the superintendent of the East St. Louis schools, observes, "Gifted children are everywhere in East St. Louis, but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by their society. They have no feeling of belonging to America." Echoing those thoughts are the East St. Louis student who asks, "Are we citizens of East St. Louis or America?" and the Washington, D.C., student who says, "By doing this [they] teach you how much you are hated."

In the urban schools Kozol visited, 95 to 99 percent of the students were non-white. "The fact of ghetto education as a permanent American reality appeared to be accepted." The nation, he contends, has turned its back, morally if not yet legally, on *Brown v. Board of Education*. In fact, the battles now being fought are to stop what the late Supreme Court Justice William Douglas termed "a dramatic retreat from *Plessy v. Ferguson*." The principal of an elementary school in New York, when asked if race is the decisive factor in the poor condition of his school, states baldly, "This would not happen to white children." And a student in Camden declares, "So long as there are no white children in our school, we're going to be cheated. That's America. That's how it is."

Economic inequity, which goes hand in hand with racial segregation, is the second major cause of the dual school system. This inequity has its roots in what Kozol calls "the arcane machinery by which we finance public education," the property tax. Very poor communities do place a high priority on education and, in fact, often tax themselves at higher rates than do their affluent neighbors. However, because their tax base is so much poorer, they are likely to end up with far less money for each child in school. For example, the entire property wealth of Camden—\$250 million—is less than the value of just one casino in Atlantic City.

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cussed the impairment of the native tongue and the acquisition of the "father" tongue, English. Because Alvarez is uninterested in such meditations, her book, in spite of the title, isn't about language. Here and there the narrative does offer insightful reflections on the transition from an ancestral vehicle of communication to an active, convenient one. Yet the idea of "losing" one's accent is nothing but a metaphor: a symbol of cultural abandonment.

A secondary leitmotif also colors the plot—that of the coming of age of a candid female writer and her indomitable need to describe, in literary terms, her feelings and immediate milieu. Yoyo, the author's alter ego, is a sensible, extroverted adolescent who loves to write poetry. In "Daughter of Invention," perhaps the volume's best story and one recalling Ralph Ellison's first chapter of *Invisible Man*, she is asked to deliver a commencement speech. Her mother helps her out. In search of inspiration, Yoyo finds Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, in particular "Song of Myself," and writes a speech celebrating her egotism, her excessive self-interest. The theme infuriates her father. In a rage of anger, he tears up the manuscript. But the mother's support encourages the girl to deliver the speech, which she does quite successfully. She is praised by her own repentant father with a gift of a personal typewriter.

Obviously, as a whole *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent* is Yoyo's product. Although its content is told by shifting narrators, she is the soul inside the text. She contrasts and ponders. She is puzzled and flabbergasted by the circumstances around her. The world gains and loses its coherence in her mind. In an illuminating segment about Pila, a bizarre maid with voodoo powers who inspired nightmares, Yoyo writes about her first discovery of things Dominican. Hers is a story of wonder and disbelief. Accustomed to a certain climate of order and to the rules set forth by her parents, she is disoriented by the behavior of the maid. After a series of mishaps that involve a cat and strange tales by a grandmother, the section concludes:

[After those experiences] we moved to the United States.... I saw snow. I solved the riddle of an outdoors made mostly of concrete in New York. My grandmother grew so old

she could not remember who she was. I went away to school. I read books. You understand I am collapsing all time now so that it fits what's left in the hollow of my story? I began to write, the story of Pila, the story of my grandmother.... I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear [Pila], a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art.

The entire volume is a gathering of memories, a literary attempt to make sense of the past. Alvarez has an acute eye for the secret complexities that permeate family life. Although once in a while she steps into melodrama, her descriptions are full of pathos. The political reality in the Dominican Republic, although never at center stage, marks the background. The repressive thirty-year-long Trujillo dictatorship, which culminated with the leader's assassination in 1961, makes the Garcías happy but complicates their lives. The democratic elections that brought Juan Bosch into power bring a period of tranquillity, interrupted by the 1965 civil war that brought the U.S. intervention and ended in the election, supervised by the Organization of American States, of Joaquín Balaguer. The family is pushed to an exile that makes its religious faith stumble and its traditions collapse. Yet *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*, unlike scores of narratives from south of the Rio Grande, is free from an anti-American message: in Tennessee Williams's terms, its primary concern is a minuscule glass menagerie, the fragile life of a group of individuals swept by epic events they constantly fight to ignore.

While imperfect and at times unbalanced, this is a brilliant debut—an important addition to the canon of Hispanic letters in the U.S. By choosing to write for an English-speaking audience, Alvarez is confessing her own loyalty: albeit reluctantly, she is in the process of losing her accent. Still, the accent refuses to die. □



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STATIC ON THE PAGE

WLT

A Radio Romance

Garrison Keillor

Viking Press, \$21.95, 401 pp.

Elizabeth Beverly



On page 12 of Garrison Keillor's mocking and rowdy first novel *WLT: A Radio Romance*, which tells the story of the rise and fall of a radio "empire" in midcentury Minnesota, "Roy [pays] Leo La Valley \$10 to tell a raw one on the 'Noontime Jubilee,' to get a rise out of Ray." Here's the joke: "So Knute told Inga he loved her so much he wanted to buy her a fancy new bed—he said, I want one with that big cloth thing up over it? She said, a canopy! He said, no, that's *under* the bed and we're going to *keep* it down there."

The book tempts me as critic to advise simply, "If you like this sort of joke, you'll like the book. Read it." And with that partial recommendation I could dismiss it. But I find Keillor's novel to represent such a troubling failure, one which raises so many fundamental questions not just about the art of writing, but also about the art of reading, that I want to linger with the joke, and the set-up, a little longer. Here we have it all: what is most intriguing, frustrating, tantalizing, and ultimately disheartening

about this first novel.

What intrigues me is simple. Our eyes alone cannot get this joke. We must hear it. We know that Keillor, the well-known radio personality, understands this. Does such understanding mean that the novel will innovatively meet the challenge of revealing a primarily aural culture through the medium of print? Does Keillor wish to make a serious statement about competing technologies? Will philosophical or cultural ghosts haunt the novel? Will we be treated to jokes, plot, and thought, all at once?

My frustration originates in Keillor's one genuine technical innovation. He decides to tell the story in countless short sections that resemble nothing so much as segments of midcentury radio programming. Short installments that variously inch forward moment by moment or lurch forward through catastrophe. Train wrecks and bran muffins rate both the same space and the same pacing. These short sections may accommodate Keillor's snappy style, but they seriously hinder his ability to tell a story from the inside. There's not enough room to move, not enough time to fill in background information.

We readers have another problem: the device immediately reveals that we are in the absolute thrall of a petty tyrant of narrative. We know that we'll get what we're given and not a sentence more. Naturally, this truth underlies all fictions, but the great-

est fiction writers conceal it, and allow their readers to imagine that they alone conspire and dream with the characters. Most readers never want to wonder just who is running the show. They just want the show to go on, and to include them perfectly.

Keillor's attachment to his device keeps his characters at a distance. There is no room for reflection; their plights simply drive the engine of plot, and resist the serious consideration we would give them were such events to happen in the lives of people who mattered to us. Is this the philosophical point of the novel: that the medium of print entraps as surely as that of radio waves? When finally, in chapter 14, Keillor indulges his philosophical ruminations about the role of radio as oral art, we don't know how to read his meanings. Is this straight parody? Or heartfelt intellectual yearning? Or simply a joke that we should get?

I'm tantalized by what this particular author thinks about this particular story. Garrison Keillor, the clever, appealing guru of folksy contemporary radio, wrote this novel and it concerns the life of radio. We cannot forget the promise inherent in the conjunction of author and subject. Yes, this is an extra-literary yearning, that we might learn something from a master, but even the text swells with the promise. Take the joke on page 12. If we simply tune into the program, we'll hear the joke and either get it or not. The book offers us the real story of what goes on behind the scenes. It suggests that we'll learn something about radio, something about human motivation, something about industry and spirit.

If this is the hope, the reader is bound to be disheartened, for the joke is a mild killer. The joke is a bad joke. I don't mean bad in the sense of "raw," although some readers might find it so. And I don't mean bad in the sense that puns are always bad; we get them and we laugh and then we feel stupid because we got them and wanted to laugh. No, I mean that this is a bad joke because the impulse that gives rise to laughter is a tiny meanness. We laugh at someone else's expense. Poor dumb Knute. A kind man, a loving man, and a man who can't tell a canopy from a piss-pot.

In just the way that the Inga-Knute joke is a bad joke, so is *WLT: A Radio Romance* a bad novel. But it doesn't take its own



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temptation to be bad quite seriously enough. And this puts the reader in an odd position. Reading this book feels a lot like standing in the cloakroom of a Midwestern elementary school before the bell rings while a big guy in your class tells first the one about the fat lady who must use the freight elevator, then the one about the "old lecher named Wendell/ Whose cock was indeed monumental..." and then the one about a little boy whose father died in a boiler explosion on a train so that other kids in another school can gather around him and sing "Ashes in the overalls/ From one little weiner and two black balls." What is the big guy getting at? Is this humor? Is this cynicism? Oral culture? Folk history? Maybe you laugh, and maybe you don't, but you've got to wonder why the big guy goes on and on. You've got to wonder what you'll say when he's through.

Oddly this book, in its good-natured refusal to embrace its own moral questioning, introduces the notion of sportsmanship into reading. Are you a good sport, finding the book an "endearing" portrait of a moment in America's life, or are you a goody-goody, someone who needs to lighten up? These are not issues that should occupy a reader. It is the author's job to understand his intentions. If he wants his readers to laugh at fat ladies and pity orphans, his writing will invisibly direct them to do so. If he wants them to worry about a culture in which some cruel people laugh at fat ladies, then such a worry will seem like the most sensible one in the world.

I think that Keillor the novelist doesn't

know what he wants. He cannot hear what he wants. He is learning to work in a medium which, in this case, has resisted him. This novel is a failed venture, but bespeaks a great hope. Maybe Keillor is embittered, maybe he's lighthearted. In either case, Garrison Keillor can tell remarkable stories; he can drop one-liners and spin out endless yarns. He can make us laugh. Hard. What he needs is practice on the page, not just as a writer, but as a reader.

If he were my friend I'd send him right

to the work of Eudora Welty, tell him to listen not with his ears, but with his eyes too. Look at the white space, the shape of paragraphs, the length and roominess of lines. Listen to tempo and cadence and mood. Learn that great fiction may sound harsh or may sound gentle, but it always dignifies its characters and their stories with seriousness, even as it laughs. When stories work on the page, we hear the warm voice of them rising in the print. They are sure and helpful, and invite us to read. □

REVIEWERS

WILSON CAREY McWILLIAMS *teaches political science at Rutgers University.*

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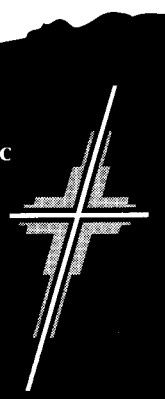
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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

vary from 0 to 100 percent. Objective evil would only involve subjective guilt for someone acting against conscience. Here conscience, not mentioned by the pope, becomes the supreme guide.

"The bishops included two statements about conscience in their November 1968 letter. While they emphasized the impor-

tance of the conformity of conscience to the church's interpretation of divine law, they recognized the possibility that Catholics might, in conscience, have to reject noninfallible papal teaching. They quoted Newman's description of circumstances in which conscience could oppose the supreme, though not infallible, authority of the pope" (*Why You Can Disagree ...and Remain a Faithful Catholic*, Meyer Stone, pp. 74-5).

When bishops addressed the then inflammatory issue of conscientious objec-

tion, they described themselves as "witnesses to a spiritual tradition which accepts enlightened conscience, even when honestly mistaken, as the immediate arbiter of moral decisions" ("Human Life in Our Day," 43).

PHILIP S. KAUFMAN, O.S.B.

A gratuitous slap

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: It was with great anticipation that I opened the January 17 issue of *Commonweal* to read the Graymoor Prize articles on ecumenism, and particularly the essay by the Reverend Theodore Pulcini, "The Alternative Is Worse." My heart sank, however, when I saw that his conversion to the dialogue of charity among the churches is announced with what amounts to a gratuitous slap at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, not to mention the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

For the record, the archdiocese has been an enthusiastic participant in dialogue with the Roman Catholic church in the United States continuously since the early '70s. It is unfortunate that *Commonweal* chose to award the Graymoor Prize to a piece which in my opinion misrepresents the position the Greek Orthodox church in this country has taken toward interreligious dialogue. The situation in Jerusalem is a unique case in a tragic situation which deserves more understanding than Father Pulcini is ready to give it. It seems to me that some apology is in order.

SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH, S.T.

The writer is associated with the Institute of Christian Oriental Research at The Catholic University of America.

The author replies:

I thank Father Griffith for his letter. It is indeed unfortunate that he feels I have taken a "gratuitous slap" at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. If he were to re-read the first few paragraphs of my essay, he would see that I understood full well the reasons the Greek Archdiocese (and, in the months to follow, the other canonical Orthodox jurisdictions in America) chose to suspend relations with the National Council of Churches. My response, as I

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believe I stated quite clearly, was to welcome the decision; for a very long time I had not understood why the Greek Archdiocese had invested itself so enthusiastically in such ecumenism. As a result of my experiences last summer, however, I came to appreciate this long-standing investment; my "conversion" was precisely to the sort of ecumenical endeavor that the Greek Archdiocese and other canonical Orthodox jurisdictions have practiced for years—and, I hope, will eventually decide to continue practicing. I fail to see how any of this amounts to a "gratuitous slap" at the archdiocese. My critique was certainly not intended as a "slap," and I never "gratuitously" call into question any policy of my church's leadership.

As for my remarks regarding the situation in Jerusalem, I stand my ground. Having worked with numerous Orthodox Palestinians in various pastoral contexts during the past decade, I feel that I have a tolerably good grasp of the ecclesiastical scene in Jerusalem, both in terms of its historical genesis and its present dynamics. If, however, my understanding is deficient, I am quite willing to be instructed by those who know more about it than I do. But if "understanding" implies passive acceptance of the situation as it now exists, I demur. Even a "unique case in a tragic situation" can, I believe, be responsibly challenged. At some point, perhaps, my zeal for addressing what I see as a serious (and destructive) injustice may have overtaken my diplomatic impulse, but I assure you I said what I did out of genuine concern for the well-being of world Orthodoxy and for those Arab Orthodox Christians of the Jerusalem Patriarchate who are struggling to preserve their faith and heritage against enormous odds. For this I make no apology.

REV. THEODORE PULCINI

'Us' vs. 'them'

Readfield, Maine

To the Editors: Like Anna Quindlen ["From the '60s to the '90s," February 14], I consider myself a liberal Catholic, conscience-guided, antiestablishment. Where we part company is over the simplistic division of a church of the people and another of the hierarchy. Us and them. That may be comfortable; it is also self-righteous and self-deluding.

Quindlen acknowledges "hundreds of letters" opposing her published views on abortion, gay rights, and similar hot-button issues. It isn't enough to suggest that only the zealots take pen in hand. It should be evident to her, as it is to me, that the liberal voice in the church is in the minority, that her church of the people is by and large as reactionary as the church of the hierarchy. Whatever we—call us the church of change—have won since Vatican II have been skirmishes only, not a battle, let alone the war.

R. J. SIEGLER

Quindlen not alone

Princeton, N.J.

To the Editors: I can't believe I'm the only one of your readers to find Paul Baumann's critique of Anna Quindlen [February 28] gratuitous and demeaning. Baumann, who sets himself up as a proper Catholic theologian, complains that Anna Quindlen is not as he is. My guess is that she would not claim to be a theologian but an op-ed writer in the *New York Times*, writing as she sees fit and with a large following who

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find her columns invariably provocative and incisive. Baumann sprinkles his critique with innuendos such as "liberal," "infuriating," "personalist morality," "idiosyncratic," "quirky," "simple," "cliché," "tautological," "uncritical," "subjective," "sentimental".... Anna Quindlen can speak for herself, but I find her saying what many other Catholics are saying, for example, Michael Leach, president of Crossroad/Continuum [*America*, November 30, 1991], who predicts that the church for the next century will look as different from the church of today as ours does from the "immigrant church" at the beginning of this century. Paul Baumann,

apparently, has no feeling for this possibility whatsoever.

HUGH T. KERR

The writer is senior editor of Theology Today.

Praise for a poet

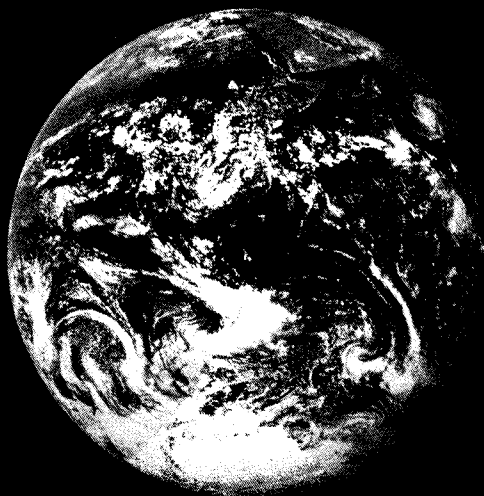
Wickliffe, Ohio

To the Editors: Kudos to poet Bruce Ducker and poetry editor Rosemary Deen for the lyric "The Frying Pan in Winter" [February 14]. Here was a glimpse into the world through the eyes of a dexterously poetical soul—one that could flirt with bathos ("in the summer of my mind") and

get away with it. Phrasings such as "green water tunnels through glass hoods" and "fisherman gently unhooks his prey" demonstrate skill in observation and a delicate touch with words. Though many possess the former, the latter is as rare as blackberries in June.

WILLIAM DAUENHAUER

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